



Tornado Safety Rules for Schools



“Each school should be inspected and tornado shelters designated.”

NOAA's National Weather Service urges all schools to develop plans and conduct drills to cope with tornadoes. Tornadoes often occur on the outer fringes of tropical storms and hurricanes.

In recent years, several schools have been hit by tornadoes. In most instances, fortunately, classes were not in session. In instances where students were present, school officials familiar with twisters safeguarded the children by taking prompt action just before the tornadoes hit. Consider the following in making your plans.

Watches and Warnings—The National Weather Service issues a tornado watch when a tornado is possible, and a tornado warning when a tornado has been spotted or indicated on radar. Remember also there may not be time for a tornado warning before a twister strikes. Tornadoes form suddenly. Teachers and students should know the difference between a watch and a warning.

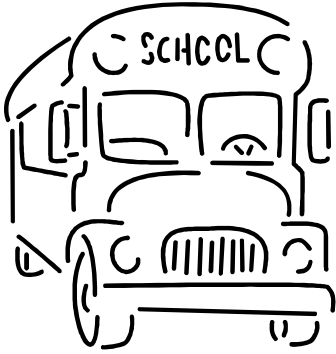
Have a Plan—School officials at the state and county level should have a plan for rapidly informing every school in the system of tornado watches and warnings, either by radio or telephone.

Know Your Buildings—Each school should be inspected and tornado shelter areas designated. Schools with basements should use these as shelters; otherwise, use interior hallways on the ground floor that are not parallel to the tornado's path, which is usually from the southwest. Never use gymnasiums, auditoriums, or other rooms with wide, free-span roofs. Teachers and students should know their designated shelter area.

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Document DH-024,
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Children in schoolrooms of weak construction, such as portable or temporary classrooms, should be escorted to sturdier buildings or to chosen ditches, culverts or ravines, and instructed to lie down, hands over head. Most tornado deaths are caused by head injuries.



“A special alarm system should be designated to indicate a tornado has been sighted and is approaching.”

Have a Bus Policy—School administrators should establish procedures governing use or non-use of school buses during tornado watches and warnings. Generally speaking, school buses should continue to operate during tornado watches, but not during tornado warnings. School buses are easily rolled by tornado winds.

Assign Emergency Roles—During a tornado watch, specific teachers or other school staff members should be designated to monitor commercial radio or TV for tornado warnings, even if the school has a NOAA Weather Radio tone-alert system. Weather spotters also should keep an eye on the sky for dark, rolling clouds, hail, driving rain, or a sudden increase in wind, in addition to the telltale funnel. Tornadoes are often obscured by precipitation or darkness. Other public agencies, too, report tornado sightings.

Specific teachers should be assigned to round up children on playgrounds or other outdoor areas during a tornado warning. Otherwise, they might be overlooked.

Use Your Alarm System—Designate a special alarm system to indicate a tornado has been sighted and is approaching. A backup alarm should be planned for use if electrical power fails—perhaps a battery-operated bullhorn, an hand-cranked siren, or even an old-fashioned hand-swung bell.

Have Emergency Procedures and Conduct Drills—When children are assembled in school basements or interior hallways during a tornado drill or warning, they should be instructed to respond to a specific command to assume protective postures and to face interior walls when the danger is imminent. Such a command might be: "Everybody down! Crouch on elbows and knees! Hands over back of head!" It is essential that this command be instantly understood and obeyed. Illustrations showing the protective position should be posted on bulletin boards.

If a school bus is caught in the open when a tornado is approaching, the children should be escorted to a nearby ditch or ravine and made to lie face down, hands over head. They should be far enough away so the bus cannot topple on them. Schoolbus drivers should be regularly drilled in tornado procedures.

School district officials planning new buildings or additions should keep tornadoes in mind when setting construction standards.